DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 260 574 FL 014 438

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TITLE International English, American English, and Other Englishes: Psychological, Social, and Functional Choices for TESOL.
PUB DATE 7 Apr 84
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Illinois Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (12th, Chicago, IL, April 7, 1984).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Curriculum Development; Dialects; *English (Second Language); *Language Styles; Language Teachers; *Language Usage; *Language Variation; Second Language Instruction; Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

Current practices and materials for teaching English as a second language (ESL) contain oversimplifications about English based on the assumption of a uniform language type and standard of usage, presented to foreign learners for pedagogical clarity. ESL teachers may be aware of the language's diversity but are not prepared to provide pedagogically and linguistically sound answers to questions about variations. English, with over 300 million native speakers around the world, is difficult to characterize accurately. Materials are available to teachers that discuss English varieties, including types labeled as "ex-colonial," "nativized" or "indigenized," "nuclear" or "utilitarian" for pedagogical and international usage purposes, regional and social dialects, jargons, slang, and stylistic variation. Choosing the appropriate functional style and switching freely from one to another is done automatically by native speakers on the basis of complex psychological and social clues that are part of cultural and linguistic experience. Foreign learners are often unable to perform or even comprehend these switches because their level of acquired English is functionally flat. ESL teachers should be ready to offer explicit advice and concrete examples about the global, regional, social, and situational dimensions of English, and plan strategies and design exercises directing students to a broader understanding of this diverse language. (MSE)

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International English, American English, and Other Englishes: Psychological, Social, and Functional Choices for TESOL

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April 7, 1984

Current ESL/EFL teaching practices, curricula, and textbooks often contain oversimplified statements about English, based on the assumption of one uniform type of English and one uniform standard of usage to be presented to foreign learners, for reasons of pedagogical clarity. It is often embarrassing and painful for these learners when they find out, unprepared, that there actually is no such body of monolithic English and that there is no universally defined and "approved" standard of English usage. Until recently, examples and descriptions of different types of English and of varying usage levels were rare in TESOL materials.

The paper discusses several areas of variety and diversity in English (global: international, intranational; social, regional, functional) which show significant implications for teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language. Because of the complexity and scope of language variation, our paper briefly characterizes only some major areas vital for TESOL. Detailed discussions and exemplifications can be found in the expanded list of sources below.

* * *

Instead of an introduction and in order to show the importance of varieties of English in ESL/EFL situations, let us quote three examples (the first two are modified question areas used recently in M.A. examinations in TESOL at Northern Illinois University).

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1. You are responsible for a two-week (three hours a day, five days a week) intensive English workshop for a group of 15 intermediate adult students of EFL (TOEFL scores 450-500) who have a background in British English and who just arrived in the U.S. from Malaysia. Describe the essential areas of information about American English which you would include and the chronological order of your presentations. Take into account the variety of Malaysian English used by these students in informal situations.

2. One of your new students (recently arrived in the U.S. from Nigeria) in your ESL course (advanced, adult) has shown you the following piece of written (and sung) American English and requested your comment: "Take this job and shove it, I ain't workin' here no more." -- Describe, in a systematic way, how you would structure a class unit on varieties of language, using that example as your point of departure.

3. A national network announcer (NBC News, 18 October 1983): "Everybody talks about the Pentagon's skyrocketing defense budget. But when we think in terms of future spending to prepare for possible 'star wars' in outer space--we ain't seen nothin' yet. (Please pardon my expression.)" -- What was the anchorman so apologetic about and why?

Frequently, ESL/EFL teachers are aware of these and other types of language diversity but they are not prepared to provide pedagogically and linguistically sound answers to such questions for reasons of time ("there is no time for such luxuries"), different priorities ("there are more important matters to teach") or insufficient background knowledge ("everybody knows what standard English is").

Although long ignored in language teaching curricula, textbooks, and teacher training manuals, it is a well-known fact that every language which

stretches over a wide geographical area and includes users with different social, educational, and other backgrounds will have variants. This is true even of languages with only a few million speakers, such as Dutch, Hungarian or Czech. It becomes even more conspicuous with English which has over 300 million native speakers spread over all continents and at least another 300 million non-native users. Strevens (1980, p. 79), characterizes the complex situation of what we could call global English as follows: "In the case of the language called 'English' the sheer number of English users whose individual performances (and competences) are summated within the fiction of 'English', their worldwide geographical distribution, the great range of social needs and purposes they serve, and the resulting myriad of identifiably different versions of English--all these factors combine to produce a paradox: as English becomes ever more widely used, so it becomes ever more difficult to characterize in ways that support the fiction of a simple, single language."

In his fascinating sociolinguistic study of the history of English, Leith (1983) devotes a whole chapter to what he calls 'ex-colonial' varieties of English around the world. Several detailed studies of some of the 'new Englishes' (such as the varieties of English spoken in India, Malaysia, Singapore, Ghana, Liberia, etc.) have appeared recently: some are listed in our bibliography. Useful tape recordings of several varieties of English are now available for ESL/EFL teachers: a cassette with 13 varieties (such as Australian, South African, Eastern U.S., Mid-Western U.S., West Indian, etc.) accompanies the excellent guide by Trudgill and Hannah (1982). Wells (1982), whose two books, out of a trilogy on accents of English, are listed in our bibliography, has prepared a cassette with 20 samples of globally distributed Englishes (available under the title In a Manner of Speaking from Cambridge University Press or through Audio-Forum, Guilford, CT 06437).

So important are the global aspects of English and the various forms of localized (some authors call them 'nativized' or 'indigenized') Englishes that two new periodicals, listed in our bibliography, were established to deal specifically with this area of interdisciplinary studies. Several conferences and colloquia have focused on pedagogical problems of acceptan and degrees of acceptability of non-native Englishes, as against International English which is largely based on the native varieties of either British or American English Recently (March 6, 1984), an excellent colloquium on Discourse Strategies in Non-Native Englishes was held in conjunction with the 1984 TESOL Convention in Houston. It was organized by Braj Kachru (see some of his publications in our bibliography), Yamuna Kachru, and Larry Smith (see his 1981 book) in a series of several marathon sessions which included various papers, reports, and discussions.

Several concepts useful for TESOL have emerged from studies focusing on global aspects of learning and teaching English. Facing the problem of international intelligibility of some forms of nativized Englishes, some authors have attempted to sketch the outlines of 'English as an International Auxiliary Language,' 'Utilitarian English' or 'English for International Purposes.' One of the most promi ng developments in this respect is Quirk's concept of 'Nuclear English' first presented in 1981 (reprinted in Quirk 1983, pp. 37-53). He proposes creating a culture-free, neutral subset of the 'national Englishes' which would be easier and faster to learn than any of the existing varieties of English. With some detail, Quirk demonstrates the careful and explicit constraints which he would place on the grammatical rules of his Nuclear English. He does not, however, elaborate on problems of a restricted lexicon, morphological rules, and on the phonology of Nuclear English.

Based on scores of studies describing the use and spread of English throughout the world, Rodney Moag (in his article "English as a Foreign, Second, Native, and Basal Language: A New Taxonomy of English-using Societies" in Pride, 1982, pp. 11-50) redefines, among other things, the traditional use of the terms ESL-EFL. In terms of language use he distinguishes among English as a Native Language (ENL) societies, English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Basal Language (EBL), and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) societies. He characterizes, e.g., Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, and Singapore as ESL societies, where (p. 20) "English will be the mother tongue of a statistically insignificant percentage of the population but the second language of a much higher, though not always high, percentage." In Moag's opinion, countries such as India, Malaysia or Sri Lanka are in a transitory stage from ESL to EFL status.

The complexities of the use of English do not stop with the global dimension. Even within the native varieties (such as British or American) there are substantial and pedagogically important language differences. They have been amply researched and described under the labels of regional and social dialects, jargons, and various types of slang.

Yet another vital dimension that substantially contributes to the complexity and difficulty of choices which have to be made in learning and teaching English is the well-known phenomenon which some authors call stylistic variation. (See, for instance, Greenbaum 1975.) Lack of time prevents us from going into details in describing this crucial set of features determining appropriate language use. It is, however, the psychological and social assessment of relationships between and among the participants in a given speech act, the implicit knowledge of who says what to whom in what situation, which determines the varying degrees of formality and the choice of 'codes' in a discourse.

Choosing the appropriate functional style, such as familial, casual, consultative, formal, frozen (see, for instance, Joos 1961), and switching freely from one to another is done automatically by native speakers on the basis of complex psychological and social clues that are part of their cultural and linguistic experience. Here foreign learners are often unable to perform or even comprehend these switches because their level of acquired English is functionally flat. In this respect, again, ESL/EFL teachers should be ready to offer explicit advice and concrete examples.

The more we know about the many global, regional, social, and situational dimensions of English, the better will we be prepared not only to answer our students' immediate questions about the overwhelming mysteries of English, but also to plan strategies and design exercises directing our students to a broader understanding and use of a diversified language.

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World Language English (the International Teacher's Journal of English as a World Language), edited by Dr. W. R. Lee (and an international editorial board), published since 1981 by the Pergamon Institute of English (Oxford).